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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: current challenges and forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls

Statement presented by Education International, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and Public Services International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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WORKING WOMEN IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY – FROM MARGINALIZATION TO EMPOWERMENT

The past decade has seen some significant achievements in various parts of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), but on balance women remain deeply concerned about the many obstacles which continue to hamper the full exercise of their rights, and the full achievement of gender equality. This means that an ambitious agenda still lies ahead; and that this is no time for reneging on the promises made in Beijing. We call upon governments to take the opportunity of this year's review and appraisal of the BPfA to strongly renew their commitments, to reaffirm the Platform and their resolve to intensify efforts to achieve full equality between women and men in all spheres of life.

As trade unionists representing some 60 million working women worldwide, we draw the attention of governments in particular to the strategic objectives of Section F of the BPfA, and to their commitments aimed at ensuring that women enjoy their fair share of the benefits of growth in the global economy through policies to "promote women's economic rights and independence, including equal access to resources, employment, training, markets, and trade, elimination of all forms of employment discrimination, and harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men." We conclude that unfortunately current economic policies are failing working women. We analyze the systemic causes of this failure, and put forward a set of concrete recommendations aimed at turning the situation around.

Globalization and its neoliberal agenda of flexible labour markets, privatization of public services, promotion of Export Processing Zones (EPZs), and increasing pressures to become migrant labourers or informal economy workers, have all worked in tandem to undermine women's rights, and to marginalize them in the global economy. Five hundred and fifty million people in the world today are classified as the working poor, earning less than USD $1 per day. Of this figure, 330 million, or 60% are women. In addition, 77.8 million women are unemployed, with the female unemployment rate higher than the male for the world as a whole. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) concludes that decent jobs need to be created for 400 million women currently filling the ranks of the working poor and the unemployed, if the increasing trend of the feminization of poverty is to be reversed. Such a decent work agenda must also focus specifically on the 35.8 million young women (aged 15-24) unable to find employment, again a figure reflecting higher unemployment rates among young women than among young men in most parts of the world.

Even though women have benefited from new jobs, a large portion of the 1.1 billion working women find themselves concentrated in low-skill, undervalued, insecure jobs with little or no social protection, and where they are paid between 12 and 60% less than men. Frequently, they experience sexual harassment in the workplace, suffer more and longer unemployment, and continue to bear the largest burden of family responsibilities. Moreover, the neoliberal economic policies of deregulation, privatization and cuts in essential public expenditures have served to shift the costs of essential service provision from the State to households. This creates even greater hardships for women.

In addition to gender-based segregation in some occupations and workplaces, pay inequity remains a persistent problem in industrialized countries and in the formal sectors of developing countries. The increasing feminization of poverty in the informal and agricultural sectors of developing countries is another cause for great concern. Precarious, low-paid, unprotected work in the informal economy is the growing lot of working women in many countries, both of the global north and the south. Migration for employment is yet another trend associated with globalization, and here women constitute about 40% of the world's migrants. Low pay is often the main cause of increased migration of women workers in the health sector, for example, in Central and Eastern European countries. Migrant women with low skills

face particularly formidable challenges, finding themselves in exploited domestic work or the entertainment sector, and increasingly trafficked, becoming objects of gender-based violence at the workplace.

Women from ethnic minorities face both gender and racial discrimination, while young women are finding themselves disadvantaged in relation to men, when it comes to finding decent work. Clearly, the rules of economic and trade liberalization are creating an increasingly volatile employment market. This can be highlighted by the plight of hundreds of thousands of women workers in the textile sector in Asia, threatened with job losses as a result of the dismantling of the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) in January 2005, which provided guaranteed quotas for textile exports to Europe and the USA. Unfortunately, efforts at union organizing in the face of such challenges, expose women to threats of intimidation, dismissals, victimization and even violence from unscrupulous employers. This is particularly the case in some EPZs. Women constitute about 80% of the 50 million-strong workforce in these zones, which are multiplying around the world. They provide low-cost, union-free locations which serve the interests of multinational companies determined to reap maximum profits from globalization.

The current neoliberal policies are clearly undermining policies in the social sector, such as public health, so indispensable for combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and policies for achieving universal education with parity. Public services provision remains indispensable to ensuring equality, and must be seen as an instrument of social cohesion.

Sound education policies remain paramount for achieving gender equality and eradicating poverty. In the Dakar Framework for Action, which was set by countries in 2000 at the World Education Forum, governments promised to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005. We now know that this goal will not be realised, but women from the education trade unions will continue demanding the full implementation of the Dakar Framework for Action, and also the Millennium Goals related to education, as well as the allocation of adequate human and financial resources for quality public education for all.

Union women have not hesitated to respond to the innumerable challenges of gender discrimination and injustice in the world of work. They have been proactive within the civil society struggle to hold their governments accountable to the commitments they made in Beijing. Equally important, union women have been transforming the structures, method of work and culture of the trade unions, and spearheading various campaigns. These have focused on organizing, giving special attention to the youth and to workers in EPZs and the informal economy, and to pay equity. Increasingly, women are participating in union work across the board, including at the highest levels of union leadership. Through them, unions are changing their profile, reflecting better the diversity in the world of work. They are, thus, responding more effectively to the needs and concerns of all workers, women and men.

With respect to attaining the MDGs, it is clear that serious obstacles remain, and that if these are not overcome through bold policies on poverty eradication and decent work, 2015 will be a year for commiseration on the continuing plight of millions of poor working women unable to sustain themselves and their families on less than $1 a day. Bold policies are needed to fulfill the commitments of the BPfA and the MDGs, and for the effective empowerment of women. We recommend the following:

- The systematic incorporation of the principles of the BPfA and the Millennium Declaration in all aspects of economic, trade and employment policies at national and global levels, and the establishment of a comprehensive system to monitor implementation.
- The full adoption at the national level of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, with a definite focus on gender equality and trade union rights.
- Continuing campaigns of the union movement to eliminate gender discrimination and pay inequity.

- Continuing campaigns of the union movement to ensure effective organizing of women workers, including organizing support to women workers in the informal sector and EPZs.
- Intensifying campaigns at national, regional and international levels for the ratification and full implementation of the Conventions enshrined in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, including Conventions 100 (Equal Remuneration) and 111 (Discrimination), as well as Conventions 156 (Workers with Family Responsibilities), 175 (Part-Time Work), 177 (Home Work), and 183 on Maternity Protection, and for effective follow-up to the Conclusions of the ILO Discussion on Decent Work and the Informal economy (2002), and to the ILO Conference Resolution on gender equality, pay equity, and maternity protection (2004). This is in keeping with the Resolution "Unions For Women, Women for Unions " adopted by the ICFTU's 18th World Congress (December, 2004).
- Adoption of a proactive approach by the ILO to ensure that laws prohibiting union organizing in certain sectors such as EPZs are eliminated.
- Governments must ensure adequate funding for quality public services as fundamental to achieving gender equality, and must provide equal access to these services. Any changes in the modalities for provision should be subject to gender impact assessments.
- Governments must introduce measures to address the persistent gender wage gap, including the extension of collective bargaining to all of the public sector, and the introduction of a national living wage.
- Governments must fulfill the commitments made in the Dakar Framework of Action, by intensifying efforts to support gender parity and gender equality goals in the fields of education and training, and to provide resources for Quality Public Education for All.
- Governments must adopt policies to ensure that women and girls (regardless of national or ethnic origin, economic or social position, migrant status, disability, or any other characteristic or condition) will have access to all levels of a human rights-based education, an education that should include sex education free from prejudices, and respectful of their reproductive health and rights.
- Prevention and treatment programmes to combat HIV/AIDS must address the gender dimensions linked to gender-based coercion, harassment and violence, including at the workplace. Strategies must encompass prevention through the education system with teacher training and gender-sensitive curricula, and workplace approaches, based on the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work.
- Governments must commit to developing policies and action plans that will bring about the institutional changes in the workplace and the home that will truly foster gender equity and an equitable sharing of family responsibilities.